

Press Release | 31 January 2025

## **Global Appeal 2025 to end leprosy-related stigma & discrimination launched from Odisha with endorsement from ministries of Health of 56 countries**

*- 30<sup>th</sup> January observed as World Leprosy Day in India to mark Mahatma Gandhi's death anniversary -*

Global Appeal 2025 to end stigma and discrimination against persons affected by leprosy was launched in Bhubaneswar, Odisha with endorsements from health ministries of 56 countries worldwide. The launch co-hosted by the World Health Organization (WHO) and Sasakawa Leprosy (Hansen's Disease) Initiative brought together persons affected by leprosy from many Indian states, Odisha Ministry of Health and several other experts and advocates for leprosy elimination. Launch of Global Appeal 2025 began with the message from Ms **Jayanti Pradhan**, a person affected by leprosy from Odisha.

Indian Minister of Health and Family Welfare Mr **Jagat Prakash Nadda's** message was read out: "If leprosy is diagnosed early, the person can lead a normal health life. Delay in diagnosis may lead to disabilities. People should learn to recognize the signs of leprosy and voluntarily come forward for diagnosis and treatment. Leprosy is not just a health issue. It is also a social issue. Stigma and discrimination hinder the progress towards eliminating the disease and violate the rights of the humans who are affected by it. Let us help each other to stop leprosy-related stigma and discrimination."

Mr **Mukesh Mahaling**, Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Odisha government, said that "Indian government as well as Odisha government has a roadmap to eradicate leprosy by 2030. Leprosy disease is curable. It is inspiring to see people who were affected by leprosy have championed the cause and become advocates now. We are working together with Sasakawa Leprosy (Hansen's Disease) Initiative (SLI) for leprosy elimination in Odisha. SLI is working with local governments in over 40 countries to help eliminate leprosy from the world."

WHO Goodwill Ambassador for Leprosy Elimination Mr **Yohie Sasakawa** said that 2025 marks 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the Global Appeal was first launched in Delhi in 2006. Since then, several Nobel Peace Prize laureates and other influential leaders have endorsed the call to end leprosy-related stigma and discrimination. He lauded the commitment of India's Prime Minister Mr Narendra Modi to achieve the ambitious goal of a leprosy free world by 2030. "If we join hands and combine our efforts the vision of a leprosy free world is not an impossible dream- together we can make it possible."

Dr **Nilakantha Mishra**, Director of Public Health, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Odisha said that "India and Odisha both are already on the pathway to eliminate the disease.

Unless we eliminate stigma and discrimination, people would face hindrances to get diagnosed and cured – and prevent complications like leprosy-related disabilities."

**Every Monday is Leprosy Day**

Dr **Kshetra Mohan Kand**, Additional Director Health (Leprosy) for Odisha Government said that leprosy prevalence in India is 0.60 per 10,000 population whereas in Odisha it is 1.48 (target is to reduce the prevalence to below 1 per 10,000 population). Likewise, 7.4 new leprosy cases are detected in India annually per 100,000 population but in Odisha, the number goes up to 18.2 per 100,000 population (target is to reduce number of new cases per year to under 10 per lakh population). There are 13 high leprosy districts in Odisha. Leprosy is declared as a reportable disease in Odisha so that private doctors can refer the people to receive full course of leprosy treatment from the government. Every **Monday** is declared as “Leprosy Day” so that all health services like provision of medicine, examination those with presumptive leprosy, ulcer dressing, physiotherapy, counselling and other services are available on the same day.

**Maya Ranavare**, who is a person affected by leprosy from Maharashtra, said that her parents too were affected by the disease. “Ending stigma and discrimination for persons affected by leprosy is critical because it affects every facet of life, be it social status, employment, education, marriage, or access to basic amenities. Unfortunately, despite advancements in medicine and technology, leprosy related stigma still exists. To break this vicious cycle, it is essential to foster awareness and education.”

Almost 100 persons affected by leprosy were felicitated in this event for championing the cause of ending leprosy-related stigma and discrimination and calling for improving efforts to end the disease by 2030.

Dr Takahiro Nanri, President of Sasakawa Health Foundation and Sasakawa Leprosy (Hansen’s Disease) Initiative said that “Unfortunately people affected with leprosy and their family members are still facing a lot of stigma and discrimination. We need to end all forms of leprosy-related stigma and discrimination. We will continue to issue the Global Appeal to end it until we are able to realise our vision of having a world where no one is suffering from leprosy - and a world where Global Appeal is no longer needed.”

SAPNA, a mascot for National Leprosy Eradication Programme was also launched with the Global Appeal 2025 to end stigma and discrimination against persons affected by leprosy.



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